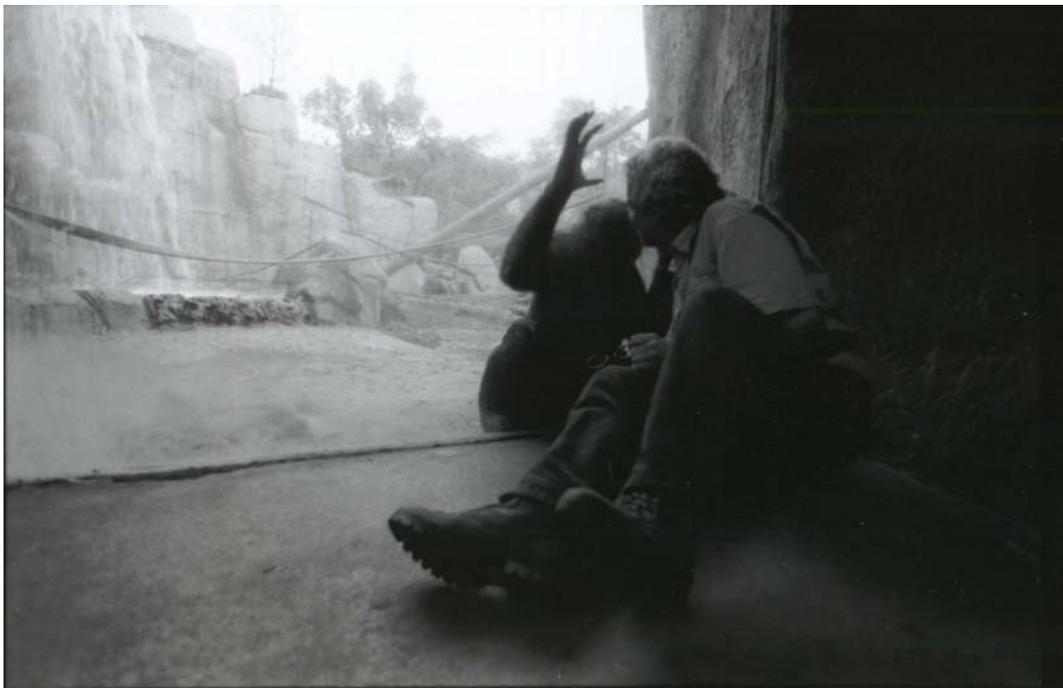




## Encountering the Animal Other: Reflections on Moments of Empathic Seeing

by Scott D. Churchill



*All zoology assumes from our side a methodical Einfühlung into animal behaviour, with the participation of the animal in our perceptive life and the participation of our perceptive life in animality. (Merleau-Ponty, 1970, pp. 97-98)*

*Looking into his eyes, I could not bring myself to pretend to talk to him the way I would to a dog or a horse: He would probably have looked at me sceptically and swaggered away. Nor could I embarrass myself by speaking English as though he could understand me. Silence, and gesture, were suddenly of paramount importance. Our eyes met, and I think that I experienced that chiasm, that criss-crossing of intentions and gestures, of which Merleau-Ponty speaks. (Churchill, 2000)*

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Primatologist Frans de Waal writes: “When the lively, penetrating eyes lock with ours and challenge us to reveal who we are, we know right away that we are not looking at a ‘mere’ animal, but at a creature of considerable intellect with a secure sense of its place in the world. We are meeting a member of the same tailless, flat-chested, long-armed primate family to which we ourselves and only a handful of other species belong. We feel the age-old connection before we can stop to think, as people are wont to do, how different we are. Bonobos will not let us indulge in this thought for long: in everything they do, they resemble us. ... There is no escape, we are looking at an animal so akin to ourselves that the dividing line is seriously blurred” (de Waal & Lanting, 1997, p. 1).

Psychologists have generally considered the perception of others from either “first person” or “third person” perspectives. This can be traced back to the epistemological dualism of modernity, beginning with Galileo’s “primary and secondary qualities”, and continuing all the way up to Brentano’s identification of two realms of investigation: the realm accessible by external perception (that is, the physical world observed by the senses) and the realm accessible by inner perception (which would be the psychological world revealed through intuition). Unfortunately, there have not been many psychologists willing to entertain the notions of empathy or intuition as a reliable or even valid mode of access to the psychological life of others.<sup>1</sup>

As a whole, the field of psychology has generally provided for first person perspectives to be legitimate means of access only to one’s own private experience, while insisting that we must observe all others’ experience from a neutral “third person” perspective.<sup>2</sup> (The separation of first and third person perspectives, and the privileging of the third, is especially true in the case of the study of animals, where first person observations are routinely dismissed as anthropomorphic and thereby scientifically invalid.) Thus behaviourism was able to lay claim to “behaviour” as its subject matter, while leaving only consciousness” for those psychologists, often

<sup>1</sup> Jane Goodall is a notable exception who invokes these very concepts in discussing her methodology (see for example Goodall, 1990, ch. 2). See also Colaizzi (2002) for discussion of the meaning of the term *Anschauung* and problems ensuing from its common translation as “intuition”.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, if I recall correctly, this was in part why Giorgi had his graduate students collect written descriptions from others (“naïve subjects”) rather than from themselves: so that psychologist colleagues could not complain that the data of human science psychology was “private”.

phenomenological in their approach, who wished to study subjective experiences. Even in places where there is an attempt to “enter into” the phenomenal world of an animal - such as in von Uexküll’s (1934/1957) now classic essay “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds”, as well as in films like *Microcosmos* or *Winged Migration* - we remain “third-person” observers perceiving the animal other, even with the most spiritual or empathic eye.<sup>3</sup> It wasn’t until Jane Goodall began her landmark study of the chimpanzees of Gombe, that a scientific researcher allowed herself to enter into a *personal relationship* with her subjects - one which afforded her a *privileged perspective* from which to observe and understand the behaviour of the chimpanzees.

Like Goodall, contemporary “phenomenological” (or, more broadly, “human science”) psychologists are not content to allow the realm of behaviour to be the property of behaviourists; rather, we wish to reclaim behaviour as the proper subject matter of psychology, once we are able to clarify how the perspective of a ‘witness’ is not limited to the “objectivistic” approach of the behaviourists. That is, we wish to enter into the “worlds” of our research subjects and participants, as well as into the worlds of our psychotherapy patients. Moreover, we wish to explore ways in which the face-to-face encounter can occasion interchanges in which we enter into more intimate contact with others - communicative exchanges in which we come to know both ourselves and others.

What I would like to do here is to present an alternative to first- and third-person perspectives, namely the second-person perspective (Thompson, 2001)<sup>4</sup> by means of which we enter into the otherwise

<sup>3</sup> In a special issue of *Semiotica* devoted to von Uexküll’s work (1992, 89(4), pp. 279-391), a preface written by Thure von Uexküll offers clarification of the ‘specific method’ of ‘Umwelt-research’: “The approach of Umwelt-research is ‘participatory observation’ where observation [Beobachtung] amounts to ascertaining which signs registered in *my* own experiential world are also registered by the living being under observation. ... Participation [Teilnahme] is the reconstruction of the Umwelt and the sharing of the decoding processes which occur during [the organism’s] behavioural activities” (pp. 280-281). “Participation is not, therefore, ‘sympathetic understanding’ [Einfühlen], and depth psychology might well profit from this semiotic analysis in its use of the term *empathy*” (p. 281).

<sup>4</sup> Reviewing the literature for other characterizations of the second-person perspective, one finds in Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) a discussion of “dialogic methods” in which two persons engage in dialogue for the purpose of clarifying the meaning of experience: “At their best,

private space of the other - and, within this space of the “in between”, find ourselves engaged, enthralled, and even enraptured.

While this species of experience is known to us all and therefore is nothing new, I want to claim that we have become forgetful of the truth that we learn in such encounters. We knew this as a child, when we wanted to crawl on grandpa’s lap in order to get a closer look at him - to bathe in the glow of his smile. But, as we grow up, we begin to recognize a difference between our own “inner world” and the “outer world” of others’ behaviours. And when we enter college and study psychology, the realm of human experience gets constructed for us in terms of the “private inner” sphere, on the one hand, and an accessible “behavioural field”, on the other. The problem, I suggest (following Merleau-Ponty), resides in how we understand our access to this field.

The reason for my wanting to describe this “second-person” realm, or meeting space, is because it might provide us with a foundation for scientific access to the meaning of other people’s experiences - a mode of access that allows us to say something truthful, hopefully valid, and eventually even reliable about that experience. (See also Churchill, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002; Rao & Churchill, 2004 for accounts of witnessing as well as being witnessed by the other.)

### The “Second Person Perspective”

We typically think of first, second, and third person references in terms of the linguistic distinction that begins with myself, the speaker, being the “first person”; you, my contemporary listener, being the “second person”; and some future audience out there who might eventually read an archived copy of this paper as a group of “third persons”, who are at a further remove from the goings-on that I am describing to my listener today. So we have, then, in common parlance, the “first person” referring to myself. In phenomenology, beginning with Husserl, it is this first person that is the reference point of the phenomenological reduction. All of phenomenology requires some kind of first person reference point, some kind of first person disclosure. Even when studying the experience of the other, I must first make

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second-person methods will lead to a rigorous psychology that depends upon both the I and You being satisfied that the experience of some event or phenomenon has been rendered in experience-near terms that can be understood by others not in the original encounter" (p. 29). What I am trying to outline here, however, is an appreciation of the “second person” perspective even before its being brought to fulfilment in human dialogue.

the other’s experience “my own” (through employment of the phenomenological reduction, which is an egological reduction - a reduction of my awareness to the givenness of my own experience), in order to subsequently perform a reflection on that experience, and thereby reveal the secret intentionalities inherent in the other’s behaviour. In other words, the “strict” phenomenologist is ultimately required, so it seems, to “reduce” the other’s experience to his own, and, in this sense, the phenomenological attitude typically remains a first person perspective, by means of which we attempt to intuit the other’s experience “from the inside looking out”. Hence our data becomes a source of vicarious experiences by means of which we enter into other “subjective” worlds.

Husserl, however, provided for another reduction - not an egological reduction (or reduction to the first person), but an intersubjective one (John Scanlon, personal communication). In this case, our point of reference is not our “own” experience, nor is it our intuition/imagination of the other’s experience - it is rather what he called a phenomenon of “coupling” where, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, “the other’s gestures furnish my own intentions with a visible realization”. In his first lecture course on *Nature*, Merleau-Ponty cites Husserl’s own definition of Nature given in *Ideen II*, in which Husserl refers to “a domain of common primal presence for all communicating subjects” as the first and original sense of ‘nature’ and of intersubjectivity. This domain is accessed, I would say, by “second person” awareness.

Merleau-Ponty wrote as follows in his essay on “The Film and the New Psychology” (1945/1964):

We must reject that prejudice which makes “inner realities” out of love, hate, or anger, leaving them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them. Anger, shame, hate, and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another’s consciousness: they ... exist on this face or in those gestures, not hidden behind them. (pp. 52-53)

What does it mean, however, to say this - to claim that what heretofore have been considered and conceptualized as “inner states” are, in fact, behavioural/expressive manifestations that are perceivable? For one thing, it affirms the fundamentally phenomenological movement away from “immanentism”. Embree (2001) observes:

... although all immediate objects of awareness had previously been considered

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to have “existence in” conscious life, they now come to be seen instead as transcendent of that life, yet still directly accessible to our awareness. The chair across the room, for example, is not an image in my mind standing for something to which I cannot have direct access; rather it is something over there that I directly encounter by seeing it and can also encounter by walking over and sitting on it. (p. 2)

In other words, emotions neither remain hidden from view ‘behind’ the other’s exterior, nor are they ‘constructs’ that we ‘project’ onto the other’s behaving body (as transcendental idealism and epistemological representationalism would have us believe). Instead, we come full circle phenomenologically when, with Husserl’s concept of “co-constitution”, we learn to recognize that what (we think) we see over there in the other’s face is not mere illusion but rather a form of givenness - and a givenness of form - that implicates me as witness in an *Ineinander* that is constitutive of what Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) has called “the flesh of the world”.

It is this *Ineinander*, this *encountering*, that constitutes “second person” awareness. The encountering itself is my means of access to the object of my encounter. Nevertheless, as Embree rightly indicates, we can distinguish here two modes of reflective observation: reflection on “what can be called encounterings as encounterings of objects and also on objects as they are encountered” (2001, p. 7). Thus second person experience (the “encountering” itself) can become the subsequent object of reflection and description, and it can also provide a gateway towards my intuition [*Anschauung*]<sup>5</sup> of the other. The encountering thus contains within it both *noesis* and *noema* - the ‘over here’ and the ‘over there’. When I stand face to face with the bonobo, with a friend, with the schizophrenic patient in the clinic, with van Gogh’s self-portrait hanging on the museum wall, I am conscious of something stirring ‘over here’ - I don’t mean ‘in my mind’ nor even ‘in my body’ but rather ‘in my experience’ which now includes my *comportment towards* the other. (Von Eckartsberg, 1971, spoke of “experiaction” to capture this synthesis of receptive and proprioceptive consciousness.)

I have become more and more interested in this second kind of reduction, this “second-person” (or

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the very use of the term “intuition” is misleading, in that it typically implies an “inside” view, whereas Kant’s original term “*Anschauung*” implied direct perceptual contact with the world (Colaizzi, 2002).

intersubjective) reduction, where it is *not* a case of “reducing” the other’s experience to my own (that is, to *my* experience of *his* experience - a way of putting it that preserves a duality between two first person perspectives - or what R. D. Laing, 1966, referred to as “interexperience”), but is instead a matter of including *within* my perceptual (and conceptual) framework the experiential *gestalt* that consists of myself and the other.

Let’s begin by turning around the first, second, and third person to fit the circumstance of the psychologist - whose interest is not his own experience, but rather the experience of some other person. In a way, psychology is built upon this interest in the other, in otherness, in how to gain access to an experience that is not my own, but belongs to someone else. In such a situation, it is the experience of the other person - or the experience of the chimpanzee, or of the bat, as in the now famous article on animal behaviour by Nagel (1974) “What is it like to be a bat?” - it is this “other’s” experience that is my point of reference. That is, my own words will ultimately bear reference in some way *to* this other’s experience (even if only in the mode of failing to represent it adequately!). So let’s here call the other’s experience, the point of reference for psychological investigation, that of the “first person”. So we establish at the outset that, when we speak of the “first person” as psychologists, we do not refer narcissistically to our own experience, but rather to the experience of “the person whom I am trying to understand”. And the question for psychology, the ultimate challenge for psychology as a human science, as a *Geisteswissenschaft*, always boils down to whether and how we might have access to this other’s experience.

Continuing with our turning around of the three persons, as we move from the person we are studying to ourselves, the question becomes: what kind of “person” do we become when we enter into scientific relation to the other person whom we are studying? Typically, psychology offers us only two alternatives: we either slip back into our own point of view, our own experience - which is anathema to the goal of psychology, and thus methodologically shunned - *or* we step back and look at this person from a neutral, detached, disinterested “third person” perspective. Thus, as psychologists, we typically aspire to become “third persons”.

Merleau-Ponty has offered us another approach to the other’s experience. He tells us that it is not a matter of trying to coincide with the other, to see the world through his or her eyes, but rather a matter of seeing the other’s experience *from the outside*, for what it is. It is by maintaining the perspective of a “witness” -

which we typically think of as a third-person point of view - that we enter into an awareness of the other's experience. Merleau-Ponty had laid the foundation for a new understanding of bearing 'witness' in his first two books - *The Structure of Behaviour*, which ends with the passionate statement that perception is that violent act which makes us know existences, and in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he speaks of the other's experience as it becomes known to me in my experience:

There is no privileged self-knowledge, and other people are no more closed systems than I am myself. What is given is not myself as *opposed* to others ... it is the doctor *with* the patient, myself *with* others. ... I misunderstood another person because I see him from my own point of view, but then I hear him expostulate [or witness his behaviour], and finally come round to the idea of the other person as a centre of perspectives ... In this bipolar phenomenon, I learn to know both myself and other. (1945/1962, p. 338)

Merleau-Ponty becomes here a champion of what I want to call the "second person" point of view, reclaiming observation as our method (from those who would call us "introspectionists"), and, along with it, reclaiming *behaviour* as the subject matter of psychology.

The question I am raising, then, is - how many 'degrees of separation' do we want, or do we need, between ourselves and our subject matter? Do we have to remain at third person distance from the other? Is there something that we can call a "second person" awareness that exists *between ourselves* when we stand face to face? And, by means of this perspective, are we able to bear witness to a more penetrating truth than by neutral observation alone?<sup>6</sup>

### Towards a Phenomenological Ethology

Elizabeth Behnke (1999) proposes "a descriptive phenomenology that does not assume a 'Cartesian' way of experiencing, but speaks from a style of

<sup>6</sup> In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, Alphonso Lingis (1994) observes: "With a look of her eyes, a gesture of her hand, and with a word of greeting, the other faces me and appeals to me - appeals to my welcome, to my resources, and to my response and responsibility. With the vulnerability of his eyes, with empty hands, with words exposing him to judgment and humiliations, the other exposes himself to me as a surface of suffering that afflicts me and appeals to me imperatively" (p. 33).

improvisational comportment characterized by a thoroughly bodily reflexivity" (p. 96). In other words, she writes, "just as Merleau-Ponty wants to move from a 'frontal' ontology to an ontology explicated from within a shared flesh, I want to move, within lived experiencing itself, from a separative, subject-facing-object type of experiencing to a more inclusive, connective mode" (ibid.). "[F]or Merleau-Ponty the human-animal relation is not a 'hierarchical' one characterized by the 'addition' of rationality to a mechanistically conceived animal body, but a lateral relation of kinship, *Einführung*, and *Ineinander* among living beings" (p. 99). Behnke suggests "we speak from within our life among animals - from shared situations in which we and the animals co-participate, from the lived experience of interspecies sociality where it is not just I who looks at the animal, but the animal who looks at me" (p. 100).

### Into the Chiasm: The Bonobo and I<sup>7</sup>

*Standing in the drizzle at the Fort Worth Zoo, I looked across the moat to the cliff wall far away where three bonobos (Pan Paniscus)<sup>8</sup> each sat huddled against the wall, high up above the grass, staring into space, waiting for the rain to stop. I was disappointed, for today I had brought students from the University to observe primates at the zoo, and certainly there would be little to see, with all the primates seeking shelter from the elements.*

*As if to salvage the day, I gathered our group together at the observation deck, gestured toward the three mounds of hair off in the distance, and began my "Spiel" about the different meanings of head-bobbing behaviour among apes. Between male gorillas, it can constitute a rude threat. Among bonobos, the head-bob is, however, a friendly gesture, so I turned and began bobbing my head up and down, wondering to myself if I looked silly to passers-by.*

<sup>7</sup> This description is taken from Churchill (2003) with permission.

<sup>8</sup> The species *Pan paniscus* was originally given the common name "pygmy chimpanzee" because it appeared smaller than the common chimp (*Pan troglodytes*). Recently there has been a shift to the African term "bonobo" as the common name for this species. One virtue of this new name is to set the species apart from association with the common chimpanzee, which is both cognitively and behaviourally more primitive. However, there is a virtue also to the old name, for when you actually stand face to face with one, you feel you are encountering something more along the lines of a cross between a human pygmy and a chimpanzee, for their bipedal stance is much closer to our own than the common chimp, and the various degrees of absence of facial hair give them a more "hominid" appearance.

And then something quite unexpected happened. As I looked out upon the large, almost empty exhibit on this rainy day in November, one of the bonobos enthusiastically returned my head bob - much to the delight of the students who had no idea what to expect. For a moment, I felt called out of my own self-absorption, and began bobbing my head vigorously, as though I had spotted a long lost friend in the distance and was really glad to see him. The bonobo then jumped down from the cliff, and, walking upright, staggered bow-legged toward the front of the exhibit, bobbing his head all the more animatedly, up and down, and then from side to side (a variation I had not seen before in the common chimpanzees at the Dallas Zoo). I stood there for a moment, caught under the spell of this mysterious encounter with a most mysterious stranger.

Suddenly I recalled something I had read about bonobos - that they had developed a system of hand gestures that they used during group orgies, to communicate to each other the sexual positions they wanted each other to take. I gestured with my arm over my head to an out-of-sight viewing window that I knew existed near the entrance to the indoor rainforest. It was a thirty second jog to get there. As I pointed with my right arm curved over my head, the bonobo took off in the direction in which I was pointing, and I disappeared from his sight, as I sprinted around an obstacle, and over toward the observation window, which was cut out of the stone wall, maybe seven feet high and six feet wide.

The moment I gestured, it was as though he knew, he understood the intent, he understood the meaning of my gesture to indicate "the meeting place over there", where he and I nevertheless had never before stood together. When I turned the corner and approached the window, he was only a few yards away, still walking upright and maintaining eye contact with me. I crouched down and looked him in the eye. We exchanged a communicative look<sup>9</sup>, and

<sup>9</sup> What I mean here is that I was not simply looking at him the way I would look at a typical animal on display at the zoo. I wanted, in fact, to take a closer look at his features, but I was prevented from doing so by the more fascinating experience of maintaining eye contact with him as we both approached the window. It was an odd sort of encounter, not unlike when you see an old friend again, and want to look him up and down, to study his features, to look for signs of familiarity or change - but you don't because at this very moment you are engaged in the more important act of re-establishing your bond with this friend, a bond which is expressed in and through the holding of the gaze, the mutually reciprocal "insertion and intertwining" of our eye contact. This was what I was feeling as I approached the glass that day at the zoo.

then he hammered against the window with his arm - and I returned the gesture.

Yes, I'd experienced eye contact with other animals before, but it was not of the same quality. With baboons, such an exchange readily escalates into an exchange of threat gestures.<sup>10</sup> With the bonobo it was clearly friendly. With just about any other animal it is more distant, less of a true encounter. (His continued head-bobbing was uncannily reminiscent of encounters with certain friends, who tend to nod their heads up and down as a form of greeting, almost as if to intensify the felt connection of the moment.)

This was more than simple mimicry. The bonobo and I were locked into this moment, we both chose to remain there, we both wanted the encounter ... can I really say that I wanted it more than he? The head-bobbing and arm hammering went on for quite a while, with each of us taking turns, almost ritualistically, hitting the back of our arms from wrist to elbow (with fist turned inwards) against the pane of the glass window to produce a thumping sound. Initially, I placed my arm directly where he had placed his, and we exchanged "thumps", all the while head-bobbing in friendly unison. Right arm, left arm, one thump, then two, and so forth. What was amazing was his unceasing interest in not only returning the "message" but also upping the ante, as when, for example, he followed my two thumps with a series of three, then sat down, placed his ear against the glass, and awaited my reply. After I'd thumped a few more times, I placed my ear against the glass and waited, and he took his turn.

Was he merely aping my gestures? I think not. I doubt that he would have gestured this way to a dog or a mountain goat or a leopard, or even to an orang-utan or a gibbon! He recognized in me, I think (I hope!), an intelligence at least equal to his own; he probably could not fathom the possibility of a greater intelligence, I assume; but at least he perceived me as his equal. (This was fine with me.)

By the end of our encounter, he wasn't paying attention to any of the other people who were now

<sup>10</sup> The last time I'd brought a group to this zoo, I had got into a face-off with an alpha male mandrill baboon named Big Bob, and amused onlookers as I proceeded to mirror his various gestures of threat - head tilt, eyelid flash, lower mandible grimace, forearm jolt - until, in a final display of one-upmanship, he masturbated himself to an erection that clearly demonstrated the mandrill facial features' mimicry of his genitalia, both of which function as displays of dominance. On this occasion I politely stepped down, allowing Big Bob to bask in the comforting assurance of his status as the alpha male.

*circling the exhibit. It was just he and I - until I waved goodbye and backed away, at which point the spell was broken; and, as I turned, I was left facing a sea of awestruck faces. The whole encounter lasted for around twenty minutes - but I will never forget it.*

The experience just described reflects the phenomenological principle of “co-constitution” (Husserl, 1900/1970), as well as the sociological principle of “participant observation” as incorporated into clinical practice by Harry Stack Sullivan (1954). In my experience with the bonobo, I was indeed playing an integral role in creating the reality that I perceived experientially and later described. Thus, my role in “constructing” both the situation described and my psychological understanding of that event places me in the dual position of subject matter (performer) and narrator. I can assure the reader that, as performer, both on this occasion and on many subsequent visits in the ensuing years, my actions have been spontaneous and not pre-meditated in any way. That is, my interactions with this bonobo occurred suddenly and without warning. Moreover, once the interaction began, I was no longer “in my head” but totally “in my body”. Or perhaps it would be better (less Cartesian) to say that I was dwelling less within my “own” sphere, and more within the sphere of “in-betweenness” - perhaps something along the lines of what Merleau-Ponty described as “the intertwining and the chiasm” (1964/1968). In retrospect, it was as though the bonobo’s gestures furnished my own intentions with a visible realization, and vice versa. As Wilhelm Reich (1933/1972) observed, the other’s “expressive movements involuntarily bring about an imitation in our own organism” (p. 362). We thereby sense in and through our own bodies the intentions and affects that animate the other, and simultaneously understand our tacit experience as significant of the other’s experience.

Husserl’s approach to the interexperience of multiple subjects is that “originally” we experience both our bodies and the bodies of others - including both animals and humans - as expressive. He writes in *Ideen II* (1952): “Each movement of the Body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc.” (p. 252). Zahavi (2003) noted in a recent article that

Husserl continues his analyses (in his *Intersubjectivity* papers) by describing a special kind of experience of the Other, namely, those situations where I experience the Other as experiencing myself. This kind of ‘original reciprocal co-existence’ where I take over the Other’s objectifying apprehension of myself, that is, where my

self-apprehension is mediated by the Other, and where I experience myself as alien, is of decisive importance for the constitution of an objective world. ... The absolute difference between self and Other disappears. The Other conceives of me as an Other, just as I conceive of him as a self. (p. 237)

In my encounter with the bonobo, I was not watching his arms and legs and trying to subsequently make myself look like him. Rather, I maintained eye contact with him throughout, and simply intended to mirror his gestures, without any real sense that what I was doing looked in any way like what he was doing. In fact, I assumed that the discrepancy between his gestures and my own poor attempts at mimicking him would be embarrassingly apparent to the bystanders - but I was more caught up in the moment of the encounter itself. I don’t think that it is out of the question to say that in this encounter I was experiencing a *union* with the object of my perception. It is just such a union that is implied by Scheler’s term “*Einsfühlung*” (1973, p. 29) as well as by Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of an original anonymous intercorporeality that precedes - both developmentally and logically - any division into subject and object. Indeed, in Merleau-Ponty’s brilliantly original rendering of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (as expounded in his essay “The Philosopher and His Shadow”), he makes the claim that carnal intersubjectivity is the very condition that makes possible transcendental subjectivity!<sup>11</sup>

Thus in today’s psychology we have one system with two terms (my behaviour and the other’s behaviour) which function as a whole. ... And since at the same time the other who is to be perceived is himself not a “psyche” closed in on himself but rather a conduct, a system of behaviour that aims at the world, he offers himself to my motor intentions and to that “intentional transgression” (Husserl) by which I animate and pervade him. Husserl said that the perception of others is like a “phenomenon of coupling”[*accouplement*].

<sup>11</sup> This is not so far from the mark, after all, insofar as Husserl himself in his *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* makes the point that Descartes’s egological reduction fails precisely to the extent that Descartes goes too far in bracketing, along with belief in the external world, a belief and thus a foundation in the body, which for Husserl provides the ultimate basis for all our acts of reflection [see also his *Experience and Judgment* (1948/1973)].

The term is anything but a metaphor. In perceiving the other, my body and his are coupled, resulting in a sort of action which pairs them [action a deux]. This conduct which I am able only to see, I live somehow from a distance. I make it mine; I recover [reprendre] it or comprehend it. Reciprocally I know that the gestures I make myself can be the objects of another's intention. It is this transfer of my intentions to the other's body and of his intentions to my own, my alienation of the other and his alienation of me, that makes possible the perception of others. (Merleau-Ponty, 1961/1964, p. 118)

Bringing this notion of "carnal intersubjectivity" or "pairing" or "union" into dialogue with my description of my encounter with the bonobo, it does appear that, in my perceptual and expressive experience of the animal other, my consciousness was focused exclusively upon his gestures, to the point where my consciousness and his body formed "one complete system": "he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality" (Merleau-Ponty, 1960/1964, p. 168). For Merleau-Ponty, "communication" occurs between two beings who each have a body gifted with intentionality, "each drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes - *making the other ... become what he is but never would have been by himself*" (1960/1964, p. 19). "*We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behaviour in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity*" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 354).

### Concluding Epistemological Postscript

It's funny how as future psychologists we all seem to start out interested in what makes people tick - an expression that appeals to a presumed inner mechanism at work - and then end up giving this up for something else that is more readily accessible: that which is measurable. In his *Zollikon Seminars*, Heidegger (1987/2001) distinguished the measurable from the immeasurable, and suggested that it just might be that a proper understanding of the essence of human reality would preclude many of our efforts to quantify it.<sup>12</sup> In science, the interest in an inner

<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Wolfgang Koehler (1921/1971) observed: "If the subject matter of objective psychological observations disappears as soon as one tries to describe it analytically beyond a certain point, then *there are realities in the animals investigated which are perceptible to us only in those total impressions [which appear to us qualitatively]*" (pp. 205-206).

"animism" quickly gave way to a search for inner mechanisms (Freud), and eventually even these were argued to be too unreliably given to scientific observation, so methodological behaviourism then took psychology into the realm of what is "given" in terms of evidence of the senses. This empiricism has defined psychology as a science, and has at the same time closed us off not only from first-person realms of experience, but also from what I am calling here "second person" realms of access to experience.

The problem of animal minds is ultimately a problem of access: anyone who has an animal companion 'knows' that there is sentience, intelligence, intentionality, even 'soul' within the animal. The ontological 'fact' of animal cognition (and even animal 'personality') does not present a problem to common sense; but it does to science. What I have tried to demonstrate in this paper is that perhaps we need to consider a third approach 'between' the extreme alternatives of methodological subjectivism and methodological objectivism: a way out of the dilemmas posed by the Cartesian framework of inner and outer, subject and object - as well as deliverance from the concomitant epistemological dualism of the "subjective" and the "objective" (or "first person" and "third person").

The "third term" that serves to undercut the antinomy of first and third person descriptions is that of the "second person" framework of observation. In third person observation, we pretend that we do not exist and that our presence does not colour the situation that we are observing. In first person observation, we pretend that *only we* exist and that we are free to characterize our experience however we wish. Scientists favour third person descriptions because, by definition, they preclude the psychological relativism of the first person perspective. That is, we adopt third person perspectives, if only to avoid the cavalier attitude toward reliability that first person observation engenders: within the solipsism of the first person, there is no way (and no need) to 'test' one's observations.

With the second person perspective, something new comes into view: the possibility of testing our 'own' experience of an intersubjective moment in dialogue with the other. This is, of course, the existential matrix of all good psychotherapy, of friendship, and of collegiality among one's peers. But it can still exist even outside the framework of speaking subjects, as when, for instance, Toby, the alpha male chimpanzee at the Dallas Zoo, saw that his keeper Valerie was sad, tearful (over the recent loss of her daughter), and he put out his hand through the cage to comfort her. Or when another keeper who had worked with this same chimpanzee for years took his hand and held it

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when, after a devastating stroke that ended his reign as alpha male, Toby was being euthanized. The reaching out of one hand to another itself represents a breach of “third person” involvement and, at the same time, a transcendence of the first person. Alphonso Lingis (1994) has written a wonderful book entitled *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, inspired by his experiences in hospices in third world countries where he sat with the dying and shared their final hours with them. I believe we might

extend the implication of the title of his book to include our relationship with animal others.

Perhaps this is where we need to focus our efforts as observers of all animal life - beyond the reach of mere anthropomorphism but still within the horizon of the intersubjective field.

### About the Author

Scott D. Churchill earned his PhD in clinical phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University with an empirical-phenomenological dissertation on psychodiagnostic seeing. He is currently Professor and Graduate Programme Director in the Psychology Department at the University of Dallas. His professional focus is on the development of phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies, and he has taught a wide variety of classes ranging from primatology and projective techniques to film studies, existential phenomenology and Daseinsanalysis. He is currently engaged in an ongoing experiential study of interspecies communication with the bonobos at the Fort Worth Zoo, and is a local co-ordinator for Jane Goodall's *Roots & Shoots* programme. He recently assumed the position of Editor for *The Humanistic Psychologist* after having served for many years as Editor of *Methods: A Journal for Human Science*. Dr Churchill is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, Past President of the Division of Humanistic Psychology, and an active member of the executive board of the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology. He has also served as a visiting professor at Duquesne University, Saybrook Graduate School, Pacifica Graduate Institute, and Macquarrie University in Sydney. In addition to his contribution in the professional sphere, he has served in Dallas as a film critic for local television, and been an invited juror at Dallas film and video festivals, for over 20 years.

Dr. Churchill's recent publications include entries in the APA's *Encyclopedia of Psychology*; chapters in the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* and in Valle's *Phenomenological Inquiry: Existential and Transpersonal Dimensions*, as well as articles in *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Constructivism in the Human Sciences*, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, *The Psychotherapy Patient*, and *Somatics*.

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